

A totem can be the symbol of a tribe, clan, family or individual. Native American tradition provides that each individual is connected with nine different animals that will accompany each person through life, acting as guides. Different animal guides come in and out of our lives depending on the direction that we are headed and the tasks that need to be completed along our journey.

Native beliefs further explain that a totem animal is one that is with you for life, both in the physical and spiritual world. Though people may identify with different animal guides throughout their lifetimes, it is this one totem animal that acts as the main guardian spirit.

With this one animal a connection is shared, either through interest in the animal, characteristics, dreams, or other interaction.

This Animal Guide offers power and wisdom to the individual when they "communicate" with it, conveying their respect and trust. This does not necessarily mean that you actually pet or spend time with this animal, more that you are open to learning its lessons.



What? A totem pole is a sculpture made of great trees. Because it is made of trees, they decay easily in the rainforest environment. These poles are usually carved and painted onto containers, house fronts, canoes, masks, intricately-woven blankets, ceremonial dresses, weapons, armor, and many other tools and implements. The humans and animals made on the poles are called *crests*, and is a family symbol, for instance to show the family's pride, history and identity.

Here are some questions to ask yourself if you're wondering what your animal totem is:

- Have you ever felt drawn to one animal or another without being able to explain why? This could be animal, including birds and insects.
- Does a certain kind of animal consistently appear in your life? This doesn't necessarily have to be a physical appearance, it could be represented in other ways such as receiving card and letters with the same animal pictured over and over, unexplainable dreams of a particular animal, watching television and seeing the same animal featured time and time again, or, actually having the animal show up.
- When you go to the zoo, a park, wildlife area, or forest, what are you most interested in seeing?
- Are there any animals that you find to be extremely frightening or intriguing?
- Is there a particular animal that you see frequently when you're out in nature?
- Have you ever been bitten or attacked by an animal?
- Have you ever had a recurring dream about a certain animal, or a dream from childhood that you have never been able to forget?
- Are you drawn to figurines or paintings of a specific animal?

The totem itself is a symbol that represents this animal. This could be any number of items - a crest, a totem pole, an emblem, a small figurine or anything else that depicts your animal guide.